

Media Education Project

About the project

We improve how violence against women and girls/gender-based violence (GBV) is covered by media makers (reporters, journalists, bloggers, journalism students) by uncovering hidden narratives, challenging assumptions and myths, and promoting public education to ultimately prevent violence.

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Media Knowledge Exchange Group members

Initially launched by METRAC in 2013, partnering organizations working to end violence against women and girls have joined together to achieve shared goals.

- Assaulted Women's Helpline (www.awhl.org)
- Barbra Schlifer Clinic (www.schliferclinic.com)
- Elizabeth Fry Toronto (www.efrytoronto.org)
- Ernestine's Women's Shelter (www.ernestines.ca)
- METRAC (www.metrac.org)
- Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto (www.nwrct.ca)
- Springtide Resources (www.springtideresources.org)
- White Ribbon Campaign (www.whiteribbon.ca)
- Women's College Hospital Research Institute (www.womensresearch.ca)
- Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (www.leaf.ca)
- YWCA Canada (www.ywcacanada.ca)

Ten trending and hidden stories

The Media Knowledge Exchange Group has identified topics and stories that appear to be trending or remain hidden in media coverage about GBV.

1. **Research gaps:** a strong body of research exists on GBV, but gaps persist in large-scale studies as the last national survey on the prevalence of this violence occurred in 1993. Interpretation also has its gaps. For example, studies have been covered in such a way to suggest that women and men experience relatively equal amounts of domestic violence, but a closer examination of findings shows that women more often experience repeated violence and violence that leads to injury, death and fear.
2. **Impact of internalization:** media stories often miss what it means to take in and believe – in other words, “internalize” – sexist attitudes that can make GBV seem acceptable. For instance, recent coverage of violent, sexist chants at a college rally focussed on the participation of young women in the crowd and didn't

address how internalization might have influenced the behaviour of everybody there.

3. **Cultural matters:** media coverage often portrays GBV as an issue that arises in “foreign” cultures. It often downplays perpetration and acceptance of this violence in mainstream Canadian culture and can place blame for violence on particular communities.
4. **Trafficking:** this issue is still under-explored, and coverage often focuses on sex trafficking. It tends to miss other forms of trafficking that can occur.
5. **STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics):** stories have noted a “gender gap” in STEM disciplines. However, fewer stories address how fear and experience of GBV and sexism impacts the “gender makeup” of these disciplines.
6. **Mental health:** more media makers are addressing mental health. But it is rare to find stories that address how the experience of GBV can lead to mental health crises and how survivors of this violence can be at risk of mental health misdiagnosis.
7. **Buzzwords:** “bullying”, “cyberbullying” and “cyberstalking” are often cited in the media. Fewer stories unpack gender dynamics of these behaviours and how they are uniquely experienced by women, girls and other groups at high risk, including LGBTTIQQ2S (lesbian, gay, transgender, transsexual, intersex, queer, questioning and two-spirited) communities.
8. **Personal stories:** coverage often focuses on individual stories of GBV. It rarely attends to how this violence is embedded our society or the exploitative implications of retelling personal stories of survivors of violence.
9. **Victim-blaming:** those who experience GBV are often subtly or blatantly blamed for their victimization in media coverage. This is often found in stories about “revenge porn” against women and girls.
10. **Legislative change:** impacts of recent legal changes on those at risk of GBV remain to be covered by the media. For instance, “conditional permanent residence” was introduced into immigration law in 2012, and organizations serving women pointed to negative effects it could have in situations of domestic violence. Its outcomes on women experiencing violence have hardly been covered by the media so far.